

(Washington, DC)— Today on the Floor of the House of Representatives, Congresswoman Gwen Moore, Vice Chair of the Congressional Women's Caucus will speak out on behalf of the women of Pakistan, calling for U.S. foreign aid to that country to prioritize the empowerment and protection of the rights of women.

“When I talk about empowering women I mean making sure that they have a chance to earn a fair wage, have access to credit to start a business or to be an entrepreneur, that they can vote and run for office, and have access to healthcare when they need it, and to send their children to school,” Moore said. “When women are allowed and left to languish in poverty, to be illiterate, and are denied the ballot and even access to basic health care, it is hard to imagine how development can take hold in any nation.”

Moore's amendment, which would make assistance to Pakistani women a priority of our nation's foreign aid to that nation, has received the support of Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman, who has included it in his larger Manager's Amendment to the bill.

“I thank the Chairman for his support of this amendment which would make clear that the empowering and protection of the human rights of women should be an important goal of our aid to Pakistan. This empowerment must include increasing access to both education and health care, especially in light of the high maternal mortality rate in Pakistan.”

Pakistan has an estimated population of 167 million, 60% of which are women. A large number of these women live in rural areas where basic services are lacking and their rights often ignored.

“Despite the threats they face, brave women in Pakistan and throughout the region are speaking out, attempting to exercise their rights to education, employment, and to be a part of the nation's political life,” Moore said. “The aim of my amendment is to make clear that U.S. policy is to support them through the aid authorized by this bill. As we extend new support to the government of Pakistan in its battle with terrorists, we must also work to uplift millions of Pakistani women and girls.”

One particular way that Moore's amendment attempts to help Pakistani women is to help ensure that they survive childbirth. Pakistan has a high maternal mortality rate. Over 400 women per 100,000 livebirths in Pakistan die. In our own country, the maternal mortality rate is 11 per 100,000. A woman in our country faces a 1 in 4800 lifetime risk of maternal death. In Pakistan, that woman faces a 1 in 74 lifetime risk.

The causes for maternal mortality are well known, lack of access to trained birth attendants and lack of access to emergency obstetric care when it is needed among others. Without aggressive action, this alarmingly high rate of deaths for Pakistani women will continue.

"Despite what these statistics may say, Mr. Speaker, a woman's life in Pakistan isn't worth any less than my own life or that of any other women here in the U.S.," Moore said. "Our aid to Pakistan must unequivocally support that view as well. It would be a sad day if we can take strong steps to protect Pakistani women from the bullets and bombs of the Taliban and Al-Qaida but not from the tragedy of dying in childbirth."

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